EAST AND WEST IN CHINA[1]

I

BACKGROUND OF THE REVOLUTION

THE world in ferment, to use the common expression, may not be the most pleasant for purposes of residence, but it is vastly exciting as an object of study. Only occasionally in the past could students contemplate social change with the detachment that is now a part of their common scientific technique. Men were too closely linked with movements for fair observation and prediction. It is notorious that political philosophers have constructed interpretations in justification of what they wanted to happen, or of some arrangement of which they approved.

But now the boiling cauldron can be studied with a relative absence of passion. It seems, too, that the human world has in the past century come into modes of action in which personal wishes and ideals play a minor part. It is like watching the upheavals of nature. The field within which social change takes place is no longer a small circle of dominant persons in which individuals are important. Movements of human masses are about as capable of control as changes of weather.

The Far East is, and will be for a long time to come, the area in which social change will be most vividly displayed

[1] A course of six university extension lectures delivered under the auspices of the Rice Institute in the spring of 1927 by John Willis Slaughter, Ph.D. (Michigan), Resident Lecturer in Civics and Philanthropy on the Sharp Foundation of the Rice Institute. Dr. Slaughter was Visiting Lecturer at Central China University, Wuchang, in 1926.

and most heavily loaded with significance. Within the Orient one has unavoidably the feeling that what will count will transpire in China. The stirrings of India portend little. Great as is her civilization, she is racially and culturally shaped to a negation of the type of action which will have practical effects upon the organization of human affairs. India will be, for the era we can foresee, a teacher and not a performer.

In Japan, just as little, does one see forces in operation which will profoundly affect human destiny. Efficient as the Japanese are in the manipulation of machines and Western forms of organization, one can see very little more than the expression of a vigorous nationalism which by itself will probably fail to carry a people very far. The Japanese excel in sensibility, in grace of form, in an artistry of living, to so great degree as to be in their own realm the despair of the rest of mankind. But one looks in vain for that deep strength, that vital folk urge which, when it reaches the surface, alters the topography of human affairs.

The difference is at once apparent in China. In spite of the antiquity and completeness of her culture, one seems to be in the presence of an unmeasured potentiality. Here is a people who have not shot their bolt. They have not specialized their racial energies into metaphysics or into artistic sensibility. For the Chinese, life is a field, not primarily of thought or feeling, but of action. This is the fundamental linkage between China and the West. However different the two civilizations, each realizes itself in the realm of conduct. There is in every Chinese, from coolie to scholar, an amazing, all enveloping practicality. It goes to the very roots of his being, and resembles, in its hardness and externality, the quality of later childhood rather than that of maturity.

Chinese life was fixed in almost unvarying forms more than two thousand years ago, which have persisted with little change to our own day. It has been unaffected by conquest, though for long periods held under the sway of outside tribes. The rulers were always absorbed into the Chinese scheme of things. This durability was not mere inertia, for the Chinese throughout their history have been intensely alive. It meant an adequate and satisfying culture which they believed so far superior to all others, as to overcome by mere contact, and without the need of exertion. This proved to be the case so long as contacts were Asiatic but failed when Europeans arrived upon the scene.

The attempt to understand the action of Westerners in the Far East takes us back to the era when we too were Asiatics, members of that great family of grasslanders who pressed outward from the home pastures to occupy all the earth. There was generated not only the irresistible energy but the discipline which has made these peoples conquerors, exploiters, state builders, and kings over the forces of nature. From the compact band of nomadic, ferocious shepherds, on to our industrial society with its thousand forms of coöperative organization, the story is a continuous one. From the heart of the Eurasian continent these populations were crowded out by the limit of subsistence imposed by available pasturage for herds. They moved toward the great peninsulas of China, India and Europe in successive waves. But the entrance to India was hindered by the almost insuperable obstruction of the Himalayas, and that to China made difficult by the Mongolian ranges and the Gobi desert. It resulted that these two terminals of migration were relatively less disturbed, and that through long intermissions, only the highest and most powerful migratory tides could sweep over such walls.

This security, lasting for centuries at the time, made it possible for the native culture of China, as of India, to mature into fixed forms.

But into Europe the highway was wide and open. By the Mediterranean, the Danube valley and the Northern plain, one horde after another poured itself into these attractive lands. The discipline of the aggressors had to be met by organization of the defenders. Europe had always to be an armed camp, which presently developed into political states. But the ferocious energy which invaded Europe and built militant states could be held by no boundaries. Europe has always been a battlefield, and only the mastery of navigation and the discovery of new lands brought a respite in the story of mutual destruction. Even upon the seas and on other shores the fight went on to decide which branch of our race would live and dominate the earth. Expansion, conquest, rule, and the wealth secured by trade—these were the factors that carried these turbulent, disciplined, irresistible members of the fighting race around the world, to press at last upon the shores of ancient China, pacific and civilized, from which their attack had probably been turned, in the beginning of their outward thrust, by formidable mountains and desert wastes.

If we Americans suppose that we have had no part in this story of expansion, we have only to remind ourselves that in a short century we have occupied a continent. This, fortunately, could be done without major military contests with other nations. But hardly had we reached the Pacific seaboard and filled the intervening areas, when we began to press beyond our generous boundaries southward into the Caribbean and westward across the Pacific. We are true representatives of our racial type. And now in all likelihood

the larger contacts between East and West will be those of our making. We are passing from the Atlantic to the Pacific era of our history, and henceforth the front doors of our national life will open westward.

This sketch of the westward migration of our race brings to attention one feature by which Chinese civilization is distinguished. The relation of conquerors to vanquished peoples involved almost universally the establishment of slavery, with the result that the new social order contained from the beginning the seeds of destruction, in the degradation of the masses and the degeneration of rulers. Western empires from Babylon onward, with this fundamental weakness, fell easy prey to the hordes of newcomers. Hence the transitory character of Western states. China, on the other hand, has never known slavery. Though held once and again by invading tribes, the manner of rule never involved servitude. A dynasty could decay and fall through luxury, as in the West, but this never profoundly affected the character or the life of the people.

What kind of country and what kind of people have provided this spectacle which is now gripping the world's attention? China essentially consists of two river valleys, extending from the west to the seaboard. These provinces represent what is originally and fundamentally Chinese. The other sections may be regarded as areas of expansion, northward into Manchuria, northwestward into Mongolia, westward toward the headwaters of the Yangtse, southeastward across the ranges to the maritime provinces of Kwantung and Fukien. Each of these outgrowths has involved some racial modification and considerable divergence of external contacts and resultant influence. It has always seemed as if the true China lay under a threat of subjection by those who, even though a part of itself, were

relatively outsiders. At this moment Manchuria and Kwantung are battling for control.

The origin of the Chinese is a mystery, though they are undoubtedly of the same general derivation as the other Mongolian peoples. They are disclosed by their most authentic remains as a tribe occupying the great bend of the Yellow River, between five and four thousand years ago. They were agricultural and therefore sedentary, cultivating the rich loess, in caves of which their habitations were established. Similar arrangements of working and living persist to the present day. From the beginning it was necessary to coöperate in works for the control of floods and to secure water. The dominant social form was the patriarchal family.

These simple facts indicate more than they state. Nearly every civilization had a similar beginning. The general rule was that some tribal branch through weakness in defense, found itself driven from regions favorable for flocks, into some area which required organized and continuous exertion to secure a livelihood. In the American southwest, in the valley of Mexico, on the slopes of the Andes, in the valleys of the Nile and the Euphrates, appear examples of this expulsion from Eden which laid upon mankind that curse of work which carried him from savagery to civilization. Agriculture implies the erection of a protective artificial environment between men and the acerbities of nature. This protective environment grows with the advance of the arts, and constitutes civilization. It has been said that civilization makes its start with the irrigation ditch, which is necessarily a coöperative undertaking that compels families to mitigate their natural hostility and substitute regulatory codes for the blood feud. Up to this beginning, time has no significance.

A patriarchal system implies a very limited political development. Probably those who could lay claim in any sense to other than family control, were tribal chieftains upon whom devolved the function of defense when needed, and who led aggression upon aborigines to force their retirement before advancing settlement. For the Chinese, always prolific, expanded their territory eastward to the sea, and southward into the valley of the Yangtse. Not until about the year 2000 B.C. do the Chinese appear to be organized as a political society under a general and continuous rule. Apparently a thousand years more were needed to establish the political order by experimental adjustment to a solid patriarchal system.

When we remember how the same problem was faced in Greece and solved by the semi-legendary hero Theseus, who secured a measure of mutual toleration among the great Attic families, and was thus enabled to establish Athens as a commonwealth; when we remember the difficulties of political coöperation in Rome when Numa Pompilius struggled toward the same result; and when we remember further that these classical states spent half the period of their existence in the solution of their domestic difficulty, and that they carried to the end the seeds of disintegration—it is not hard to accord China a millennium for this achievement. The final solution was of course the opposite of that found in the West. For, here, the eternal pressure of enemies forced the state system into supremacy with a corresponding restriction of family life. In China the family system maintained itself and the political organization had to make the adaptation. In any case, about 1000 B.C. China presents herself as a nation with dynastic rule.

Through the next period, lasting to 250 B.C. the various arrangements for control and guidance of conduct became

established on the lines that have been preserved to the present day. They were not only fixed in custom, but were stated by the sages during the last five hundred years of the period, in a manner to exalt the Chinese rules of conduct into a great ethical code which presented itself then and subsequently as a brilliant literature.

Then came the full outflowering of this evolution in the Han dynasty, which lasted for three hundred and fifty years. During this period China was a unified, flourishing and aggressive empire. Domination was maintained over all eastern Asia and so far west that contact was established with the Roman legions. But the Chinese political order, dependent upon the character of its rulers, was especially liable to decay, and this nemesis had overwhelmed the dynasty by 200 A.D. For the next four hundred and twenty years, the country was given over to control by military adventurers in much the same manner as at the present time. A number of separate kingdoms were set up, and China made her nearest approach to what is known as feudalism in the West, with the same veneration for personal nobility. This period, like the corresponding period in the West, was prolific in materials that make a permanent claim upon the imagination. Drama and fiction have in China much the same content that we received from our own age of chivalry.

The need of political organization again asserted and expressed itself in the great Tang dynasty which ruled over a united China for three hundred years. During this time the Chinese raised their civilization to the highest peak. But the old disease of luxury overcame its rulers and it fell an easy prey to the Tartar hordes whose chieftains held it under their sway until the year 1350. Not even the descendants of the khans could withstand the degenerating

effects of Chinese rule, and this weakness opened the way for the third great native dynasty, that of the Mings, which ruled until it went down for the same reason before the Manchus in 1644. The story of dynastic decay repeated itself in our own time, and the era of imperial rule over the flowery kingdom came to an end with the revolution of 1911.

The contact of China with outside nationalities has been overwhelmingly one of trade relationships, associated in only slight degree with military aggression. When Western nations expanded their influence and domination over the world in the three centuries following the era of discovery, they were impelled by the two motives of conquest and profitable trade. The latter usually involved the former, as trading posts had to protect themselves, and they gradually expanded their areas of control until native rule fell under the shadow of European domination. Maritime expansion was the counterpart and continuation of the earlier land migrations. It happened, however, that the great chartered trading companies which served as vehicles for this movement, found their energies fully employed in establishing themselves in India and the East Indies. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that China came into the program of European expansion.

Trade relations were established early and the volume of trade grew rapidly through the seventeenth century. China was from the beginning peculiarly reluctant to give these freebooters any kind of foothold on her territory. She happened to be so organized, with her guild system, that the trade contact could be limited and controlled. The merchant guilds deputed the duty of dealing with foreigners to a special group which constituted a channel for the

passage of goods without permitting any further foreign contact. The Cohong at Canton, the one port opened for trade relations, was China's great wall to keep out the aggression of overseas commerce. This method operated successfully for more than a century, during which period trade was merely trade, and involved no kind of political relationship. To be sure, the Chinese officials were constantly intervening for furtherance of their own interests, but at the same time refusing any kind of official understanding or responsibility. Naturally the customs was the officials' opportunity, and it was so well used that the foreign trader never knew whether on arrival at Canton, his goods would prove to be assets or liabilities. Every attempt to reach official arrangement of the conditions of trade met rebuff, and friction increased until the war with Great Britain broke out in 1840.

The results of this war, embodied in the treaty of Nanking in 1842, established the typical relationships of foreigners with the Chinese which have continued in force to the present time. China gave a merely perfunctory assent to the conditions with no intention of carrying them out, which circumstance led to the second British war in 1860. There was added to the previous arrangement another by which legations were established at Peking, so for the first time foreign nations had access to the imperial government. The Nanking conditions of peace, which became effective after the second war, opened certain ports to foreigners, ceded Hongkong to Great Britain, established a customs administration at a uniform rate under foreign control, and forced acceptance of extraterritoriality or jurisdiction by each foreign country over its own nationals. All of these were, of course, imposed upon the Chinese who merely wanted to be left to themselves. The

whole question may be considered one of abstract rights. We may accept the divine right to be left alone, but on the other hand, Westerners have never deviated from their belief in the divine right to carry on trade. If trade was to be carried on conditions had to be arranged, and refusal to meet the conditions had to be met by force which the Westerners possessed in abundance. In spite of the clamor made against these impositions, it is hard to see how a Western nation, determined to trade and after a successful war, could have made them more moderate. It did not represent any attempt to dominate through conquest but merely an effort to protect the processes of commerce.

The opening of the ports involved that special arrangement by which the establishments and operations of foreign merchants were limited to definite areas. This, it should be understood, was not so much an exaction as a protective measure on the part of the Chinese. To this day trade contacts are limited, with few exceptions, to the concessions in which foreign goods pass into native channels. The foreign trader is unable to own property or carry on business under treaty protection outside the concession limits. It will be remembered that the same arrangement was in common use throughout western Europe in the days of the Hanseatic League, when foreign merchants were allowed special areas in which they could do business and manage their own affairs. The concessions in the treaty ports were the least desirable areas of land that the Chinese could find. Mud flats, however, in time became foreign cities with enormous native cities growing up in dependence upon foreign trade. These spots are now the objects of envy and resentment, and it is an ambition of the Chinese to acquire control over them. They fail to understand that buildings and pavements, banks and street cars, are no more

than a heap of junk when the foreign merchant withdraws his activities.

It does not appear that the trade arrangements described played any special part in lowering the prestige of the dynasty nor were they regarded by the Chinese people in the sense of aggressions upon their national integrity. But they did provide channels for the entry of Western influence, for the traders, even though limited, were in direct contact with a section of the native population. Western goods and methods of doing business, Western machinery and forms of organization were under the continuous observation of the people who, conservative as they were, could not fail to desire the benefits so clearly displayed. The concession cities provide the points of contact between East and West, the points where cultures touch and fuse and mingle.

The treaty of Peking also secured protection for the missionaries, and made it possible for the missions, in contrast with business upon which restricting rules were laid, to own property outside the concessions. Protestant missionaries entered the field early in the nineteenth century, and for a hundred years struggled against overwhelming disadvantages, and with a result that seemed negligible when measured against the effort. China is a country of vast religious toleration. The religion of the masses is the merest superstition, and the educated Chinese simply have no interest in the matter. Fanatical outbreaks against the missionaries have not been anti-Christian, but only anti-foreign.

Since the Boxer settlement of 1900 which provided greater security Christian missions in China have developed into a factor with which the country must reckon. There are large bodies of native Christians who, because the convert falls under the suspicion of both native and foreigner,

display a type of character superior to that of the professed Christian community in a western country. It is a mistake to minimize the results of direct evangelical efforts. But in the past quarter of a century other methods have been adopted, notably education and medical care. Thus a flood of influences different from those associated with business, have had entry through the numerous mission stations established in every part of the country. The methods and content of western education, practically exemplified in so many centers, have made slow but certain headway against the exclusive classical instruction. Perhaps the principal result of mission work which will prove of social and political value in the reconstruction of China, is the training given native Christians in the morality of community and public relationships as contrasted with the native ethics, which is of almost wholly private bearing. It may be that the Chinese Christian will prove a needed connecting link between the old and the new China.

The foregoing sketch may aid in understanding in broad outline the setting of the stage for the great drama which began in 1900. Without an account of these factors we may be misled into attaching far too much importance to the persons and events now claiming the attention of the world. These, after all, are no more than puppet men and puppet actions, moved by forces that seem too ancient and spectral to be significant to Western eyes accustomed to see nations rise and fall in the brief span of a century. In China the ultimate and determining social forces are as deep as Chinese life itself, and move with the momentum of four thousand years.

The situation at the beginning of the century displayed three circumstances which made some kind of change inevitable. First, the weakness of the dynasty, the prestige

of which had been declining throughout the nineteenth century. Not even the personal strength of Tsu Chi could compensate for the feebleness and corruption of the Manchu princes. The popular reaction which flamed into the Boxer movement was at the beginning anti-Manchu, but was adroitly changed by the Empress into a crusade against foreigners. The defeat which followed and the indemnity penalties amounted to a death blow. Coördinate with this, although antecedent in time, was the defeat suffered at the hands of the Japanese. China might accept conquest by another power, and might ascribe the misfortune to the feebleness of rulers whose business it was to keep heaven friendly and enemies harmless, but to be defeated by Japan, the nation of contemptible pigmies, was for every Chinese to drink to the dregs the cup of ignominy. Then, thirdly, European nations were passing again beyond the region of trade relationships into that of political domination. The Chinese might overlook what Russia was doing in Manchuria, or other nations were doing in other parts of the kingdom, but when the Germans established themselves in the province of Shantung, the matter was not a trifling one with which the people could believe they had nothing to do, but one infringing upon basic things. For Shantung is the heart of China, the province of its most sacred traditions, where the sages lived and taught, which contains the sacred mountains and the tomb of Confucius.

These were the circumstances that stirred China out of apathy and started that sequence of events, the end of which no man can foresee. The general result was acceptance of the decision that China must follow the example of Japan and learn from her western enemies the secrets of their power. A number of commissions were sent to Europe to study institutions and military methods, and the

first of the great stream of students moved out to the colleges of Japan, Europe and America.

It is not to be supposed that the Chinese in undertaking to westernize themselves had any expectation of altering things essentially Chinese. Western civilization seemed to them merely a set of clever devices, a bag of tricks, which could be taken and made to serve protective purposes without interfering with the institutions or mode of living of the country. In other words, no real change was contemplated or conceived to be possible besides the acquisition of Western technique in war and industry.

While this attitude has undergone some modification, Western civilization has had far less effect upon the Chinese than we commonly suppose. It is possible that here the greatest difference between East and West displays itself. For the West in reality has no bag of tricks or set of devices. Western development concerns itself with types and not with things. A great ship which seems a triumph of technical skill and the last word of science, goes, so far as thought is concerned, into the discard before she has left the building yard. We construct buildings that ought by right to stand half a millennium and sweep them away for replacement within a quarter of a century. We are in truth like little children, with building blocks interested in devising new structures. We build them up and knock them down to try another and more interesting design. For the West nothing embodied in things has permanence. It is simply the growth of great type forms like genii taking shape out of smoke. For us permanence belongs to eternity alone, and the rule of our life is unceasing change which we call progress.

It is difficult for the Chinese to comprehend this essential characteristic of Western civilization. For, with him,

permanence is a quality of the here and now. It is ascribed to life itself, and to the rules for its conduct, and to the things which it uses. The Chinese builds himself a dwelling. It is the proper business of the building to be permanent up to the point when it ceases to exist. To effect repairs would really be an offense against the dignity of that building. When it falls in the end, if he and his family escape, they build another of the same kind and with the same qualities. In this of course the Westerner is correct when he begins, even with a new building, to paint and repair and tinker. On the other hand the Westerner thinks that the fundamental relations of human life are as transitory and changeable as the designs on his drafting board. We think we can alter the constitution of the family in a few years by this or that piece of legislation or education. The Chinese knows that the fundamental relations such as those of the family, are so permanent that they cannot be touched without injury, that they have been the same since organized life began and that they will alter only slightly as long as organized life persists. It is possible that East and West have something to learn from each other.

The reëducation of a nation which contains one-fourth of the human race is a stupendous program. It is impeded by the preconceptions and attitudes natural to the circumstances. The Chinese do not come as humble learners, but with the pride and complacency of an ancient and enduring culture. They have become conscious of what they regard as certain superficial defects in handling situations forced upon them by barbarians. They have had no other experience of outsiders than that of coming to them for the benefits of their civilization. The primary difficulty, then, is that they will not willingly lend themselves to the true

genius of western life, of which forms and methods are no more than by-products. What is only a wavelet or an eddy on the bosom of a swift onflowing stream, will be regarded by them as a solid and permanent thing. That quality of the West which invents and changes and readjusts in a medium growing always more flexible, is likely to be disregarded. As a result, methods and mechanisms will be taken out of their relations and fail to grow when grafted on the trunk of Oriental life. Machines compete for existence like living forms and in relationships to their environment. Success in the West may by no means be necessarily the same in the East. The whole industrial system may be an entire misfit. A factory system which grew out of European feudalism might flourish under the same conditions in Japan, but prove an utter failure in China. On the other hand, it may be that modifications of Western methods that have little chance in their native habitat are precisely the ones that can fit Chinese conditions with greatest advantage.

Western teachers are guilty of the same encrusted complacence as their Chinese pupils. They have no shadow of doubt regarding the superiority of their own culture nor of the adequacy of any Western method of doing things as compared with those of the Orient. For them progress in China means simply the acceptance of the Western scheme of things. We assume that our ways are proper and normal for all mankind and that no people can do better than to discard their own and accept ours. We seldom reflect that any particular historical development might have transpired in a different and better way. We feel that the path we have trod was inevitable and the only road toward perfection. In brief, we are likely to present to the Chinese an undiscriminating commendation of all things Western.

In truth the essentials that matter are the assumptions on which life proceeds habitually and unconsciously, and which are taken for granted. Certainly the business man, and probably the missionary, is likely to present his civilization, as the Chinese is disposed to receive it, as a mere bag of tricks. Even a university may fail to make explicit to an oriental student the true genius of the West, without which he stands without a key before an unopened door. Here then is a task worthy of our greatest thinkers and teachers. China has committed herself irrevocably to a program of Western learning. To some of us it seems a pity that this had to be, that a civilization so fine, so pacific, so complete, could not remain free from the destructive onslaughts of Western energy. But the step has been taken and the spectacle we are witnessing to-day of disturbance and destruction is the first fruit of our teaching.